WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Founded December 19, 1857 NOVEMBER 1976

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

COUNTY CALENDAR

CHELSEA HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Sam Breck of Ann Arbor Bank will present a program on "Trains and Trolleys" at 8 p.m. Monday, December 13 at the Congregational Church.

DEXTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY—The Rev. Robert Miller of Manchester, a former missionary, will give a slide program on Ethiopia at 7:30 p.m. November 18 at Wylie School. The meeting may be changed to the museum if heating equipment is installed in time.

The annual Christmas sale will be Saturday, December 4, at the museum, 3443 Inverness Street. It will feature Christmas ornaments of ceramic, stained glass and punched and pierced tin and bookmarks with the strawberry design stenciled on the museum walls as well as other items.

MILAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Meets third Wednesday of month at 7:30 p.m. at the Milan Community House.

SALEM HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Christmas bazaar planned Friday and Saturday, December 10 and 11, at Salem Township Hall. Special meeting at Greenfield Village at 12:30 p.m. Saturday, November 20.

SALINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Social meeting with Christmas cooky exchange at 8 p.m. Tuesday, December 21, in Blue Lounge of Saline High School unless otherwise announced. Those attending may eat or take home as many cookies as they brought.

YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Annual Christmas party planned Sunday, December 12, at museum for the membership.

WCHS SEEKING BARTON POWER HOUSE FOR MUSEUM

Pending final agreement between the Ann Arbor City Council and WCHS Board of Directors, plans are being made for a special membership meeting in December to consider the Barton Power House as a possible museum.

The site was recommended to the Board by the museum search committee headed by Hazel Proctor. The new museum committee was appointed by President Thomas F. Lacy last fall after the collapse of negotiations for the Fleming Creek Mill.

A date has not been set for the special meeting but members will be notified two weeks in advance as required by the constitution, Mrs. Proctor said.

The committee was charged with evaluating sites including all past recommendations. The Board accepted the committee's recommendation and authorized them to proceed with legal arrangements necessary to bring a resolution before the society.

Mrs. Proctor will make information about the proposal available before the special meeting to any member requesting it.

USING CARD CATALOGUE TO BE GENEALOGY TOPIC

Miss Marjorie Drake, retired director of the Rare Book Room at University Libraries and former teacher of library sicence, will speak at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, November 28, at the Genealogy Section meeting in the Hatcher Graduate Library.

Her topic will be "How To Use The Card Catalogue For Fun And Genealogical Gain."

Those attending should enter by the south door, take the elevator to the eighth floor and turn left through the double doors to the Rare Book Room. A 1 p.m. help session for beginners is planned.

COUNTY IN 1876, THREE OLDEST BUSINESSES TOPICS FOR NOVEMBER 18 MEETING

What are the three oldest operating businesses in Washtenaw County? What was the county like in 1876 during the nation's centennial?

The answers will be given at 8 p.m. Thursday, November 18, at Liberty Hall in Ann Arbor Federal Savings & Loan, Liberty at Division Streets, Ann Arbor.

Stuart Thayer, vice-president and curator of WCHS collections, will talk about the businesses. Hazel Proctor, treasurer and past president, will show slides of county scenes of 1876 or thereabouts.

Dr. Robert M. Warner, director of the Michigan Historical Collections, will present certificates to representatives of the oldest businesses for the Historical Society of Michigan, which conducted a statewide search for such businesses.

GUESS WHAT?

Can you guess what or where *Ene Bore* is?

It's a creative misspelling of Ann Arbor received at the post office one hundred years ago according to the *Ann Arbor Courier* weekly issue of November 10, 1876.

Michigan Histoircal Collections, Bentley Library, U-M.

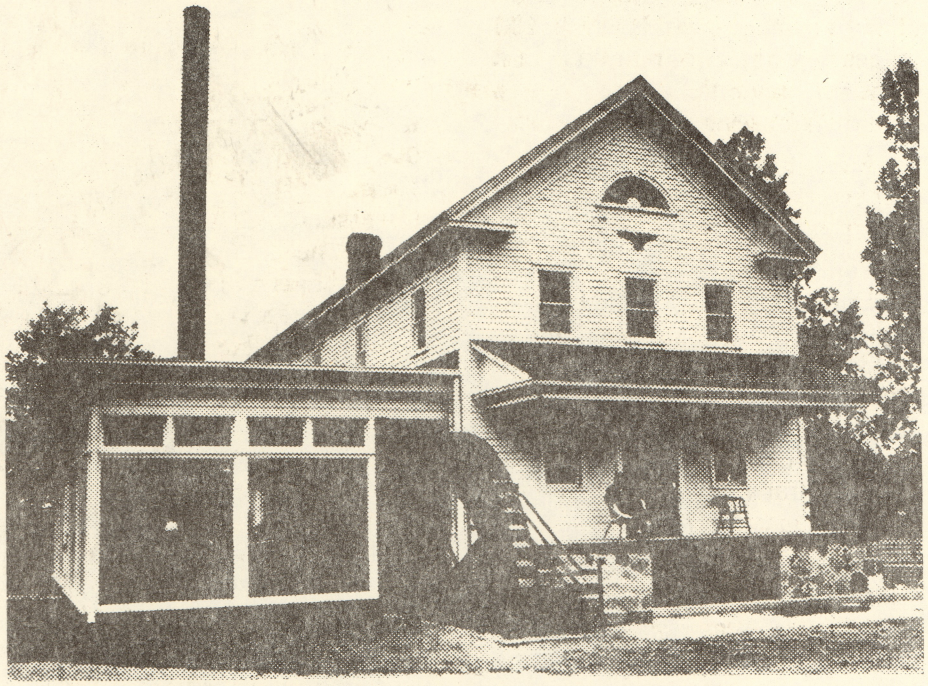
DOWN BY THE OLD MILL STREAM

By David L. Lewis

Mr. Ford was a visionary—one of the most visionary Americans of his day. One of his dreams was to offer employment to farmers and villagers in small water-driven factories.

The city, said Mr. Ford, had been a mistake. It meant high land costs and taxes, poor housing, and congested traffic. The country, in contrast, was an area of hope. "With one foot in industry and one foot in agriculture," said Mr. Ford, "America is safe."

Millions of rural Americans were cheered by Mr. Ford's philosophy. If the factory could be taken to the country, rural people could remain at home, combining their chores with earning $6.00 a day in a nearby Ford plant. Farmers would soon have the best of both worlds.



DYNAMIC KERNELS MILL, MACON

In 1919 Henry Ford bought hydropower sites on rivers in Michigan, Ohio, and New York. By 1925 nine rural production centers were in operation. The first of these hydro plants was an old mill in Northville, located 12 miles up the Rouge River from Ford's home in Dearborn. It began making Model T valves in early 1920.

Some of these factories, such as the four mills on the Rouge River, were truly "village industries" employing only a handful of workers. Others, however, were sizable factories employing a work force of up to 1,000, among them a plant on the Mississippi at St. Paul. All of the factories, large and small, were fully or partly driven by waterpower. Ford, eager to show people that hydro-power was effective, usually displayed his generators in glass-enclosed rooms so that visitors could more easily view his plants' inner workings.

Ford's village industries were not a financial success, but the auto king, breaking ground, did not count what he spent. In fact, between 1935 and 1941 he established a dozen additional hydro-electric plants on small Michigan streams; and in 1938 he had drawn up a list of 212 more waterpower sites. Making such parts as hubcaps and gear shift knobs, cigarette lighters, carburetors, and horns, Ford's rural hydro-electric factories employed 2,400 persons in 1939.

Unfortunately, the village-industry plan was neither a panacea for factory workers nor farmers. Small hydro plants, such as the rebuilt Northville mill, did not proliferate throughout the land. In fact, only a handful of Ford's rural plants were kept in operation after the founder's retirement in 1945. Five of the factories continued to make Ford parts until the mid-1950's; three into the early 1960's. Today only the rebuilt Northville plant, still making valves, remains a part of the Ford empire.

Without exception, however, the plants are still standing, and nearly all of them are in active use as manufacturing units, such as the factory in Brooklyn, Michigan, antique shops, community/youth centers, county maintenance facilities, and so on. Most of the factories-in-the-meadows remain astride their head-races, dams and spillways, tailraces, and mill ponds, which, now as in days gone by, offer excellent fishing for workers and small boys. Some plants also have retained their water wheels and generators, while others have kept three additional Ford plant hallmarks—tunnels, used for emergency exits and ease of pipe and wire maintenace, wooden block floors, which Henry Ford believed were easier on his workers' feet than concrete surfaces, and bird-houses, some of them condominiums accommodating up to 75 families of purple martins.

So in a sense Old Henry's plants have neither died nor faded away, and today they seem to point the way to an idea whose time may be coming. In recent years there has been increasing talk about moving plants from cities to towns and villages where workers can be nearer their jobs and improve the quality of their lives.

For a glimpse into the past—and perhaps into the future—motorists in a day's time can conveniently visit nine of Ford's village industries. The tour is centered around Macon, once the capital of Henry Ford's rural empire. It winds 100 miles through a four-county area. One can travel the distance and see the mills in seven or eight hours.

First stop on the tour is Ford's former Saline soybean extraction plant, now the home of Weller's Country Store.

Ford acquired the three-story 130-year-old Saline river mill in 1938, and its 19 employees processed soybeans into oil for plastic auto parts until 1946. The mill's water wheel and generators were sold several years ago, but the nearby dam and lake remain.

In back of the mill is a large garden, complete with scarecrow, and a former carriage house, now used for wedding and other receptions.

Across the street from the mill is a charming house, of which the core is a historic one-room schoolhouse moved from the countryside to this site by Henry Ford in 1943. Ford operated this school for several years. Afterwards, it became a private residence.

The Saline mill's proprietors live in the former grain hopper on the second floor. Their store is open seven days a week.

From Saline the village industry trail leads westward to Manchester. On the east side of town is a picturesque dam and mill pond, and, downstream, a plant, one of only three ex-Ford factories still capable of generating its own hydropower.

Completed in 1941 and a producer of instrument clusters until 1957, the Raisin River facility until recently manufactured scrap compressors for an Ann Arbor-based firm (Economy Baler). Visitors may peek through the powerhouse windows and see the original twin generators.

Leaving Manchester, tourists drive a few miles further to Sharon Hollow on the Raisin River, site of Ford's smallest plant. Sharon Mills, which began making cigar lighters in 1939, employed only 14 persons. For the past half-dozen years, it has been an antique shop, open whenever people come, seven days a week.

The proprietress of Sharon Hollow lives on the second floor. She bought the mill in 1962 from a couple who so loved the place that they asked that their ashes be poured into its headrace, to run through the turbines and out the tailrace. Their request was carried out, with relatives and friends gathered on the generator balcony, for the ceremony.

Rebuilt under the personal supervision of Henry Ford, Sharon Mills retains the rough hand-hewn beams, wooden-pegged cherry paneling, rare whitewood, hand-masonry, and other distinctive features of a bygone building era.

As the structure was being rebuilt, Henry Ford would try to jiggle a beam here, a floor board there, and if anything moved in the slightest, he'd say to his workmen, "It'll never last." The workmen got the point, and the mill was built to last, putting it mildly.

The proprietress and her sons have maintained the generator, which provides the building with electricity and light.

Next stop on the tour is the ex-Ford plant in Brooklyn. A Ford parts and equipment factory until 1967, the Raisin River plant now houses the Jackson Gear Company. The original part of the plant was built in 1939. Clearly discernible additions were made in the 1950's and 1960's. To this day workers place droplines in the mill stream flowing beneath the original plant, catching for supper the bass or bluegill that lurk in the cool waters. Adjacent to the factory is the mill pond. There is a picnic ground a couple of blocks to the north of the plant.

From Brooklyn the tour heads for Tecumseh. On the Raisin River east of the city is the hydro plant which once cleaned soybeans. Rebuilt in 1935, the building now houses a teen club and other community facilities. The Tecumseh plant is in an attractive setting, with the mill pond and tree-lined Raisin River nearby.

From Tecumseh, proceed to Macon, which as mentioned earlier, once was the capital of Ford's rural empire.

In Macon, Ford maintained a home in which he stayed overnight and on weekends when touring his farms and village industries. The auto king ran Macon's only store, which is still in operation, and the village's phone service out of a building recently converted into an attractive duplex. Across the street from the phone building is Ford's former elementary school. The school is now a private residence, and is in excellent condition.

Ford's residence also is well maintained by its present owners. The original smoke house and dairying house are in excellent condition, as is the barn in which Henry Ford held old-fashioned dances, and a handsome outhouse, complete with a woodpecker-shaped door handle.

The focal point of Ford's Macon operations were the white frame buildings which housed his sawmill, fire department, and high school. The buildings now house Boysville, a home for wayward youths operated by the Archdiocese of Detroit. Ford's school offered courses in woodworking, blacksmithing, and old-fashioned dancing, along with readin', writin', and 'rithmetic.

Also at Macon is a vault to which some of the Ford Company's records were removed during World War II as a precaution against an air attack on Dearborn.

The next stop, just a mile south of Macon, is the last of the village mills built by Ford. His so-called Dynamic Kernels Mill, the crown jewel of Ford's village industries, is nestled in a natural amphitheater, protected by tall cottonwood trees.

The grist mill is not open to the public, but motorists may enjoy much of its beauty and charm from the nearby roadway.

The Dynamic Kernels mill was erected in 1944 to commemorate harvests of a religiously-inspired wheat tithing project in which the auto king had become interested. The mill is well maintained by its private owner. It contains its original equipment and still occasionally grinds flour. Oddly enough, the equipment was sold some years ago, then had to be bought back. The owner, an old-car devotee, has a 1910 Model T, parked on the first floor of the mill. A Ford tractor driven by Henry Ford in 1943 was recently on display on the mill's grounds. The vehicle, owned by a neighboring farmer, was specially equipped with lights and a bumper.

From the Dynamic Kernels Mill, motorists should proceed east into Dundee. Just east of the triangle which serves as the village square sets a century-old Greek Revival mill, which Ford restored in 1935-36. The plant made copper welding points for Ford until 1954 when it was sold to another industrial firm. This company operated the plant until it was sold again—for $1.00—to the village of Dundee. The mill since has been converted into village offices and a community center. Dundee's generators will be restored to provide emergency power for the building.

Leaving Dundee, motorists move on to Milan. Built in 1938 on the Saline River, the Milan facility's 144 employees made ignition coils and processed soybeans until 1946. Now its powerhouse is the home of city offices. The community's library is located in a latter-day addition to the right of the powerhouse. The white frame structure behind the library, a former manufacturing area, was torn down in 1975. Behind the powerhouse are three Ford-related buildings. The former soybean processing plant in the old restored mill is now a community center. A barn, brought by Henry Ford to Milan from Highland Park, is now a village storage area, and another structure, removed by Ford from a nearby farm, now pumps gas for village vehicles. This building is slightly buckled, a structural deficiency which probably has Henry Ford resting uneasily in his grave.

From Milan, the village industry trail leads to the Rawsonville hydroplant, three miles east of Ypsilanti. While driving over the dam backing up Ford Lake, one can look through the plant's windows and see the original generators. This plant once supplied power for Ford's Huron River generator and starter plant in Ypsilanti. Today, at its base, is a fishing and canoe launching site.

Ford's village-industry tour, complete with mills and dams, is unique in America. No other part of the country offers motorists a look at so many hydropower plants in so compact and picturesque a setting. If you like old mills and dams, and like to prowl around under rustic bridges, I think you'll like this tour down by the old millstream.

* * *

Lewis, professor of business history in the U-M Graduate School of Business Administration, is the author of a recently published 600 page book entitled, *The Public Image of Henry Ford: An American Folk Hero and His Company.*

A TOUCH OF CLASS

"A nice place to promenade is on the new walk around the Court House Square. This walk gives our place a metropolitan look," observed the editor of the *Ann Arbor Courier* in the edition of November 3, 1876.

Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Library, U-M.

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THURSDAY
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8:00 P.M.
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